

# **\*\*ATTENTION\*\***

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# **WETLANDS**

## Vital to Wildlife and to People

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### **What Are Wetlands?**

There is no scientific debate about what a wetland is. It is soil covered by water or saturated with it often enough to grow certain types of plants. After several earlier attempts, scientists in 1989 agreed upon a method for identifying wetland areas by analyzing soil and plant materials. That agreement followed two years of field tests by the Federal Interagency Committee for Wetland Delineation. The most qualified soils scientists, botanists and wetlands experts from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Fish and Wildlife Service formed the committee. This method was endorsed by the scientific faculties of the University of Washington and Society of Wetland Scientists. It remains the most scientifically accurate method for identifying Northwest wetlands.

### **What Do Wetlands Do?**

Scientists agree wetlands perform many functions. One of the most important is to provide food, water and cover to animals.

Wetlands do not have to be large or even obvious to perform these functions. In fact, some 30 percent of Washington's remaining wetlands are seasonal. It takes an expert to identify them in the dry season. Nevertheless, seasonal wetlands are very important for wildlife. Wetlands do not have to be large to be productive. A half-acre Washington wetland can provide feeding and breeding habitat for a small flock of green-winged teal, a type of duck, and 10 other migratory birds. The wetland also may provide overwintering habitat for cut-throat trout and several hundred juvenile coho salmon. In addition, one pair of marsh wrens, two pairs of red-winged blackbirds, one pair of bitterns and 20 Townsend voles may feed and breed in it. Wild visitors may include great blue herons, osprey, deer, raccoons and other animals.

## What Are The Types of Wetlands?

There are many ways to classify wetlands. Here is one very simple way:

TYPE	Percentage of wetlands remaining in Washington	Examples of animals using this type
SEASONAL	30%	Swans, coho salmon, cutthroat trout, ducks, geese
MARSHY	60%	Raccoon, marsh wrens, red-winged blackbirds
OPEN WATER	10%	Ducks, geese, heron, beaver, sandpipers

## Why Do Wetlands Need Buffers?

Scientists agree that to perform its functions well, a wetland must be surrounded by a natural buffer. The wetland and buffer combine to provide the food, water and cover all animals require. The greater the buffer, the richer the diversity of the life in and around the wetland. In western Washington, 359 of 414 animal species need wetlands and their buffers. Three hundred and 20 of eastern Washington's 378 animal species use wetlands and their buffers for breeding or feeding. The state is losing its wetlands rapidly. An estimated 50 percent of the state's wetlands are gone — and with them, the plants and animals that depend on wetlands.

Different aspects of each type of wetland have varying degrees of importance to the various species that rely on them. Priority fish species such as cutthroat trout, and in some instances steelhead, need buffers ranging from 50 to 200 feet. Waterfowl may require buffers exceeding 600 feet. Muledeer sometimes need wetlands for fawning. The distances underscore the importance of buffers for diversity. The more species we want to flourish, the larger the buffers we will leave. We must be very cautious when we tinker with our wetland systems. There is an analogy for humans who, like animal species, are drawn to the wetlands — the places where land and water meet. Humans could continue to live in their habitat — a house — if the living room was demolished. The habitat would be much less suitable if the bathroom was demolished. At some point, the habitat — human or wildlife — ceases to be inhabitable. Wetlands do more than provide habitat for wildlife, however.

## **How Do Wetlands Directly Help People?**

**"In Bellevue the wetlands are wet and the homes and streets are dry," says Diessner. He adds, "If you don't preserve wetlands, the ratepayers and taxpayers end up paying for structural solutions later on . . ."**

They help maintain surface and ground water quality and control erosion and flood waters. Wetlands can absorb large amounts of flood water. Fast-growing Bellevue has carefully investigated the capability of wetlands to control floods and made the conscious choice to rely on them rather than expensive storm drainage systems.

Damon Diessner, director of the city's Storm and Surface Water Utility, has found a piped drainage system is four to 10 times more expensive than a stream and wetland system to control floods.

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Without wetlands or an expensive storm sewer system, serious and expensive flood damage is bound to occur. And, in fact, more serious flooding is occurring in many parts of Washington.

As Bellevue has demonstrated, growth and wetlands protection are compatible.

The same is true in Island County which has had regulations protecting its wetlands since 1984. The regulations direct development and growth to areas most suited for it.

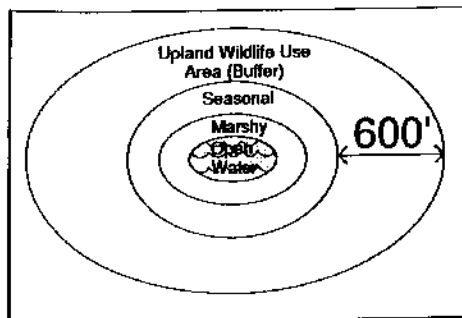
"It would be hard to argue that our wetlands regulations have an adverse effect on our economy in light of the fact that we remain the fastest growing county in the state," says Dwain Colby, an Island County commissioner.

## **How Do Wetland Regulations Affect Farms?**

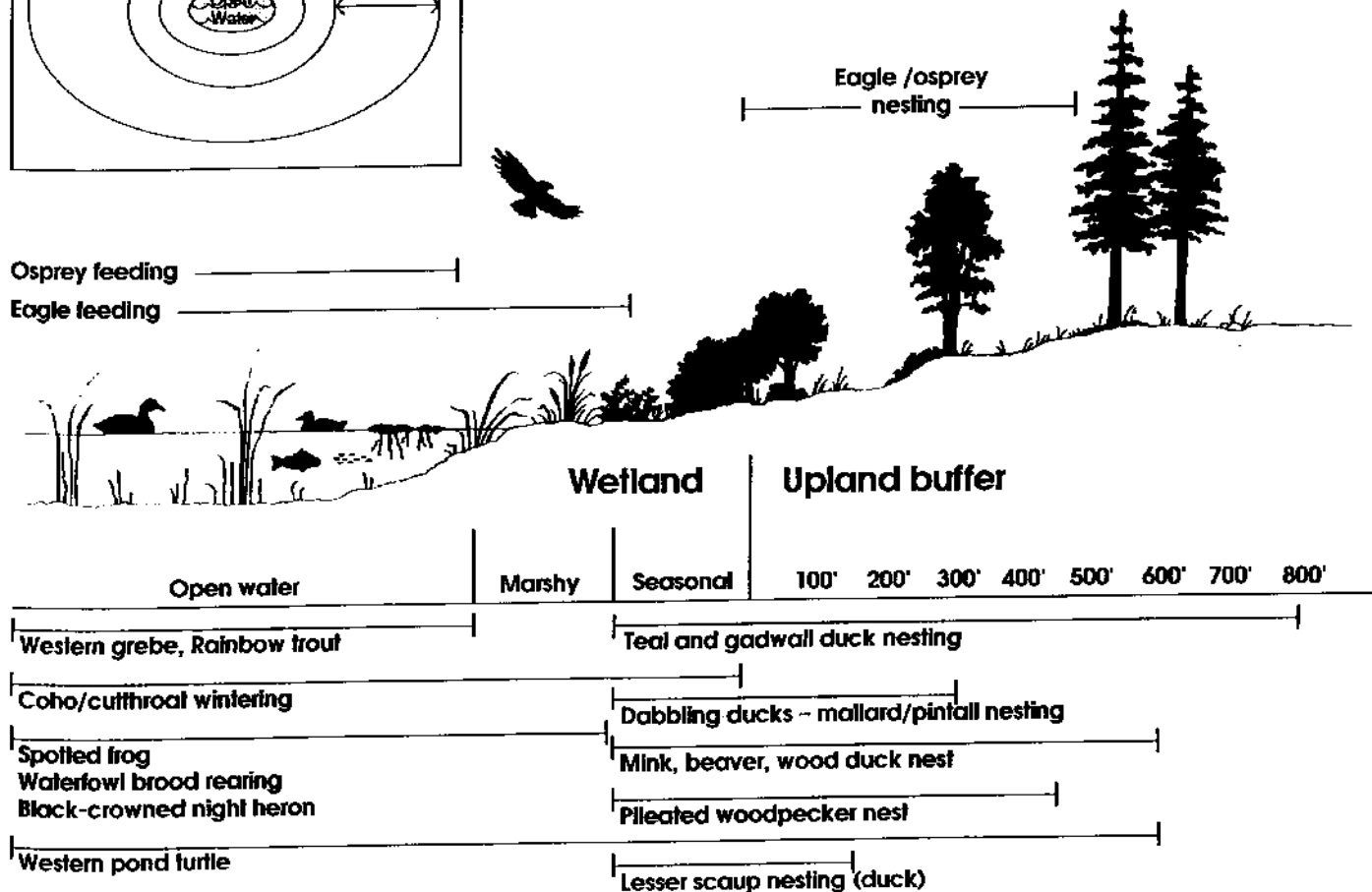
Farming and wetlands protection are compatible. Farmers growing crops on their property are not affected by wetlands regulations. State and federal wetland regulations don't apply until farmland is converted to other uses, such as condominiums and warehouses.

## **How Do Landowners Find Out Whether They Have Wetlands?**

Most county planning departments in Washington have maps showing the locations of wetlands.



# WETLANDS System



# **WETLANDS**

## Marshy

A change in the wetland definition and/or the 1989 delineation manual would leave some of these wetlands types unprotected.



### **Representative Species**

- bittern
- northern harrier (marsh hawk)
- marsh wren
- red-winged blackbird
- muskrat
- blue heron
- common snipe
- black-throated and MacGillivray's warbler
- long-toed salamander

### **Representative Vegetation**

- cattail
- sedge
- water parsley
- willow

# WETLANDS

## Seasonal

Temporary flooding



### Representative Species

- ducks
- Canada goose
- swan
- sandhill crane
- red-tailed hawk
- American kestrel
- savanna sparrow
- Lincoln sparrow
- pileated woodpecker
- coho/cutthroat rearing area

### Representative Vegetation

- grasses
- red osier dogwood
- willow
- cottonwoods
- alder
- spruce
- cedar

A change in wetland definition and/or the 1989 delineation manual would leave the majority of this wetland type unprotected.